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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: INTERFAITH IFTAAR PROMOTES RELIGIOUS
TOLERANCE

¶1. Summary: On September 18, the Ambassador hosted an inter-faith Iftaar dinner for 24 Muslim and Christian leaders in Ouagadougou. Guests were pleased that inter-faith dialogue was being promoted, commented on the usefulness of the event, and encouraged similar activities in the future. Guests stressed that there is a high degree of religious tolerance in Burkina Faso. End Summary.

¶2. The Ambassador's September 18 interfaith Iftaar was one of several outreach events that Embassy Ouagadougou has completed for the Ramadan season. Iftaar participants included local Imams, leaders of Muslim associations, and priests and pastors from local churches. Following remarks from the Ambassador, several leaders thanked the Ambassador for her initiative to host the event and asked that she host similar activities in the future. Muslim leaders commented on their own continuing efforts to foster dialogue among religious groups to maintain social unity in Burkina Faso, and on how well this kind of interfaith outreach works for a religiously integrated nation like Burkina Faso.

¶3. Overall, the Iftaar was a success and advanced the Embassy's goals of promoting mutual understanding and religious freedom. Participants were both surprised and pleased that different religious groups were brought together for a meal honoring the end of a day of fasting by Muslims. Following lively discussions around the dinner table, Embassy staff distributed informational materials about Muslims and religious life in America.

¶4. Guests agreed that religion in Burkina Faso is not defined by class, region, or ethnic group and that devout Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants co-exist in the same family, causing few disputes, and each group, more or less, respects the others' beliefs. Furthermore, the guests stressed that religion does not interfere with business or government affairs and is not used as a tool for discrimination.

¶5. COMMENT: Religious tolerance is strong in Burkina Faso, due to the country's history and social structure. Nonetheless, it remains important to strengthen this culture of tolerance, so that extremists will not be able to gain a foothold. Events such as this interfaith Iftaar are a good way of bringing together key religious leaders who play an important role in forming public opinion in this country.

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